



Department
for Education

Style guide for Department for Education research reports and briefs

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Introduction

Along with all Department for Education (DfE) publications, research reports and briefs must be in a standard format. This is to ensure that all DfE commissioned reports are accessible for disabled people and to comply with The Equality Act 2010.

This short guide gives step-by-step guidance on how to use the DfE research publication template

Why accessibility matters

The Equality Act 2010 makes it illegal for a website/information provider to discriminate against a disabled person. In practice, this means you must design and implement your information so that disabled people can access it effectively.

Accessibility is often thought to apply to websites alone, since that has had more press coverage in the past, but in fact, it applies to other types of information like video, spreadsheets and PDF.

You can access the legislation here:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

Information providers need to ensure their content is accessible by those with a wide range of potential impairments:

- visual
- hearing
- motor-skills
- cognitive

What are the standards?

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has produced a number of accepted guidelines, which are divided into three priorities:

- priority one - **must** comply otherwise some users will find it **impossible** to access the information
- priority two - **should** comply, otherwise some users will find it **difficult** to access the information
- priority three - **may** comply, otherwise some users will find it **somewhat difficult** to access the information

DfE information always complies with priority level one and aims to meet priority two as often as possible.

This document and the following websites explain the requirements for a variety of media types in more detail:

- <http://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG20/quickref/>
- <http://www.w3.org/TR/wcag2ict/>

There are many good quality free training resources online to help you master the skills needed to make your content accessible.

Guidance on writing research reports and research briefs

Research reports, briefs and technical reports

There are usually three formats:

- **A research brief** – A self-contained summary of the research, usually around 2000 -2500 words. Readers may not be familiar with research jargon, but they are likely to be educated readers looking for an answer to a question.
- **A research report** – Usually the main output from the research.
- **A technical report** – Not always necessary, but can be useful as a more detailed “academic” report which places greater emphasis on methodology.

Structure and content of reports

There are no hard and fast rules, but a research report is likely to contain the following:

- **Contents and table of figures** – linked to sections in the report in order to meet our accessibility standards
- An **executive summary** highlighting the key findings, conclusions and recommendations.
- An **introductory section** setting out aims and objectives of the project and the policy context of the research.
- **Methodology** – usually confined to one chapter or placed in an annex. This should include the following:
 - A brief description of the research method(s) used with reasons for the choice of method.
 - If relevant a description of the sample(s) (size, structure, selection method etc.) and some idea of how representative it is.
- **Findings** - consider using summary boxes to highlight key points at the start of each section reporting findings. It is often best to structure findings around the themes which emerge rather than around the methodological chronology
- **Conclusions and recommendations.** This is where we answer the question: “so what?” It may need to refer to policy developments in the area. Any recommendations should clearly stem from the interpretation of the evidence, where possible being linked back to specific key findings.
- **Appendices**, which could include:

- Research instruments
- Technical detail
- Depending on the report, a short glossary of terms and definitions may be appropriate.

Formatting requirements for research reports, briefs and technical reports

All DfE publications must now be in a standard format. This is to ensure that all our reports are accessible for disabled people and to comply with The Equality Act 2010.

In summary, the new format means:

- A standard front and back cover for all reports
- No contractor logos on the cover or in the report
- Pages are numbered in plain text in the centre of the page.
- There is a contents page, list of figures and list of tables which link to the relevant sections in the report:
 - For reports and research briefs – the contents page should be on page 2, followed by a list of figures and a list of tables.
- Body text in Arial 12
- Spacing – Multiple 1.2 (to check, Highlight the text, right click the text and click on paragraph)
- All headers are in the appropriate front and size as specified in the template.
- All bullet points and numbers are in the appropriate style.
- All figures and graphs are clearly labelled as 'figure 1', 'figure 2' etc.
- All tables are clearly labelled as 'table1', 'table 2' etc.
- Colours are from the approved colour palette

You should also consider the following when you are creating a report or brief:

- Don't justify text, always left-align it
- Avoid using blocks of italicised text.
- Don't underline text that is not a link.
- Avoid double spaces between sentences.
- Footnotes should be used sparingly, if at all, and in Arial 10.
- Tables should be used only for the purpose of setting out tabular data and not for general page layout. They should always have meaningful column headings. The font should be Arial and not smaller than Arial10.
- Avoid using flowcharts as it is difficult to make these accessible.

Recent examples of research reports and research briefs using the new format are available on the [DfE Research Publications website](#).

Titling publications for GOV.UK

Now that the department's publications and consultations are sitting alongside other departments' documents on GOV.UK, the need for clear, distinct and unique titles is greater than ever.

For example, calling a report 'research criteria' gives the reader no indication of which department it comes from, what type of research it relates to, or who the target audience is.

Tips on titling your document:

- Keep titles short and simple. Try to keep them to fewer than 65 characters (including spaces).
- Avoid using policy or technical jargon. If you have to use jargon, please also include an explanation in plain English.
- Try to make your title as specific as possible, as there may be other documents with similar titles on GOV.UK.
- Draft titles with web searches in mind. Use the words that most people will use to search for the document on GOV.UK and on internet search engines.
- 'Front-load' all titles. This means putting the words people are most likely to search for at the front. Use colons as connectors. For example, 'Income Tax reform: impact assessment' is clearer than 'An assessment of the impact of proposed reforms to Income Tax'.

Examples of titles

We suggest that you use the policy name at the start of the title and the word 'evaluation' or 'review' etc is at the end (often after a colon). So for example:

- Pupil premium: an evaluation
- Summer schools programme: the impact on pupils
- Family Fund Trust review

Using the Department for Education research report and brief template

Please ensure that you write your text into the DfE research report and brief template for all research reports and briefs. The template ensures that all reports and briefs have a consistent look and follow DfE corporate style. The template has the DfE branding saved within it – e.g. logos, margins widths and saved heading, body text and bullet point styles.

Use the saved heading styles and create a table of contents

All reports and briefs should have a table of contents, to allow readers to navigate the document more easily. Skimming through headings and the contents makes it easier for people to pick up the gist of the entire document quickly and look up something specific.

| | |
|---|------|
| Contents | |
| Table of figures | vi |
| Acknowledgements | viii |
| Executive summary | 1 |
| Key findings from the survey of schools | 1 |
| Key findings from case-study schools | 2 |
| Conclusions and recommendations | 3 |
| About the study | 4 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| 1.1 About the study | 5 |
| 1.2 Evidence | 6 |
| 1.3 The aims | 7 |
| 1.4 About the study | 8 |
| 2 Evaluation of the programme | 9 |
| 2.1 Strand 1: The programme | 9 |
| 2.1.1 Sample | 9 |
| 2.1.2 Survey design | 10 |

You will need to use Microsoft Word's 'styles' bar and apply headings to the document. The table of contents is generated automatically from the heading styles.

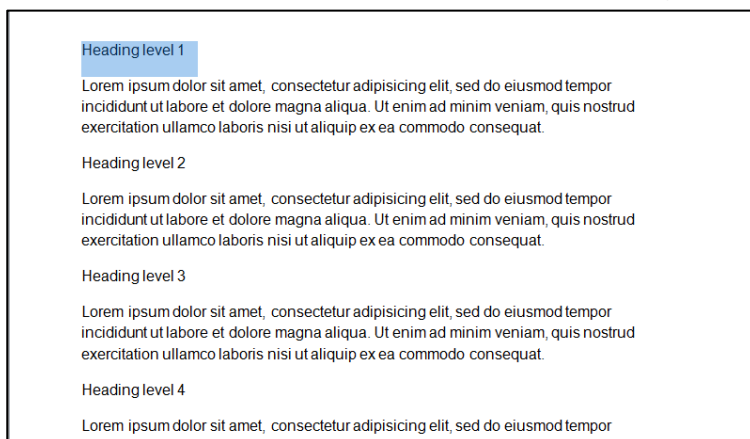
There are 4 heading levels saved in the document. Heading level 1 will always start on a new page. Only heading levels 1 and 2 will appear in the table of contents.

To update the table of contents to reflect changes in headings and page numbering, right-click on the table of contents and click 'Update field'.

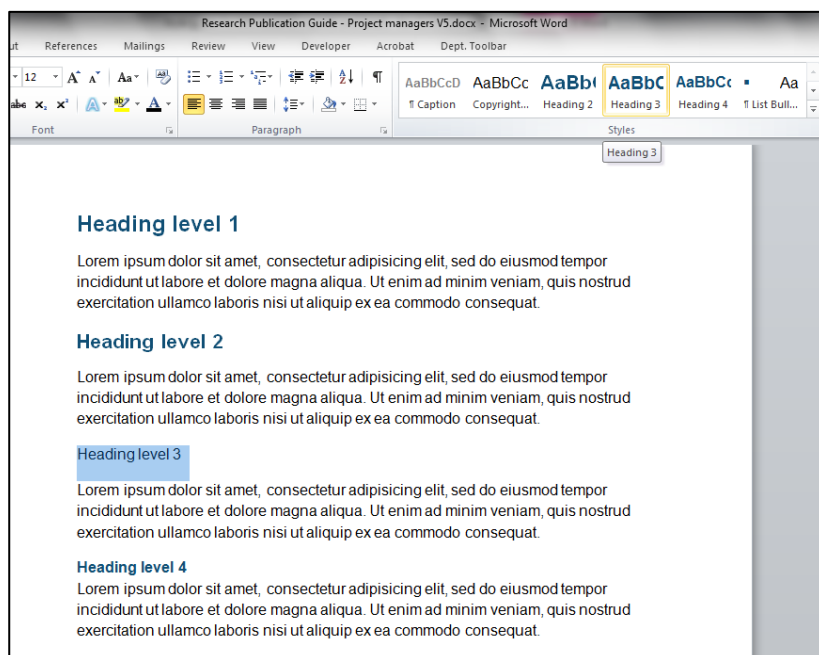
Please ensure the heading levels are used in a logical order, for example 'Heading 3' follows on from 'Heading 2', rather than 'Heading 1'. This assists users in navigating the document and in finding related information.

How to apply heading styles:

1. Select the text you want to make into a heading.



2. On the 'home tab', in the 'styles group', select the appropriate level heading style from the Quick Styles gallery, e.g. Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3

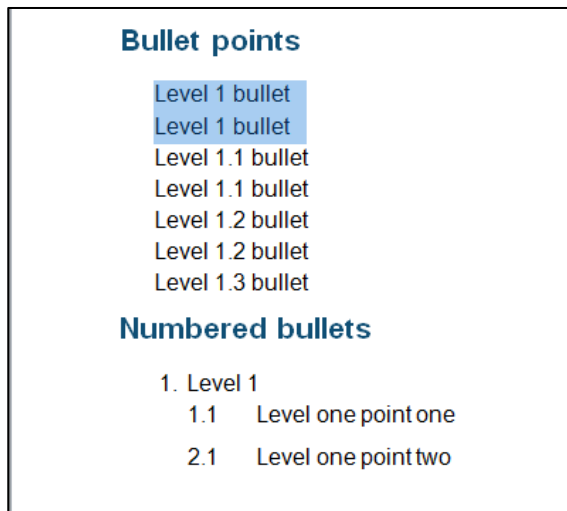


Use short headings

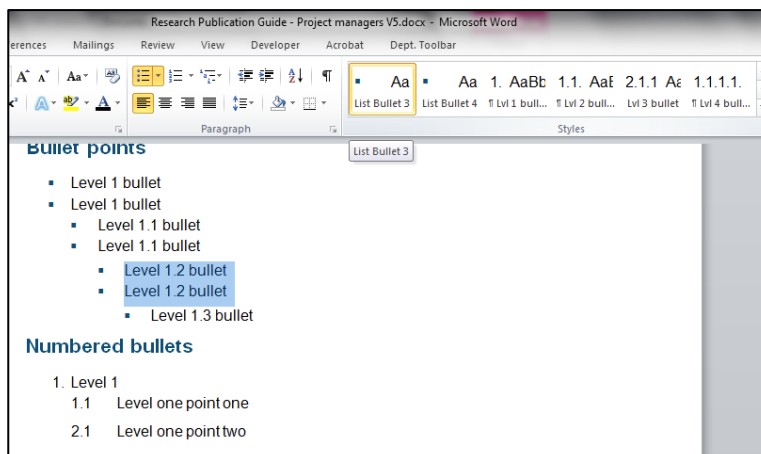
Document headings should be short so that readers can quickly navigate the document. If you use long heading titles, they will be cut short in the navigation pane in Word or Adobe Acrobat and can lose their precise meaning. Headings should be a maximum of one line or 20 words long.

How to apply bullet point styles:

1. Select the text you want to put into bullet points.

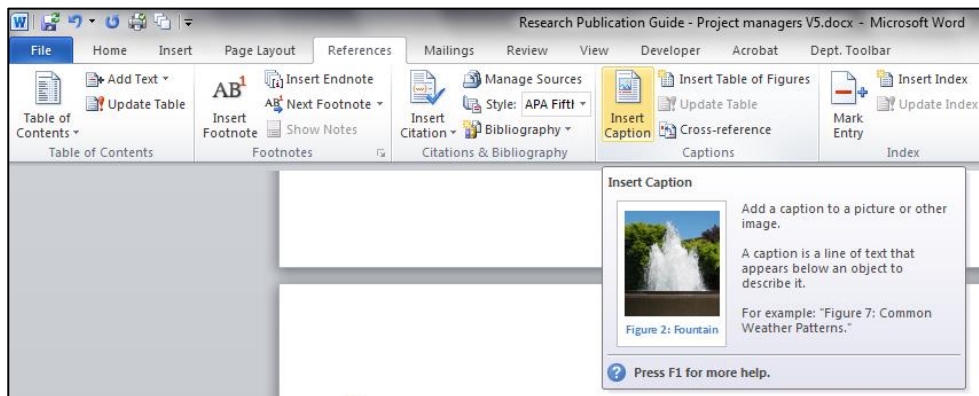


2. On the 'home tab' in the 'styles group', select the appropriate level bullet point style from the 'quick styles' gallery, e.g. Bullet list 1, Bullet list 2, Bullet list 3
3. This would be the same for numbered bullet labels.

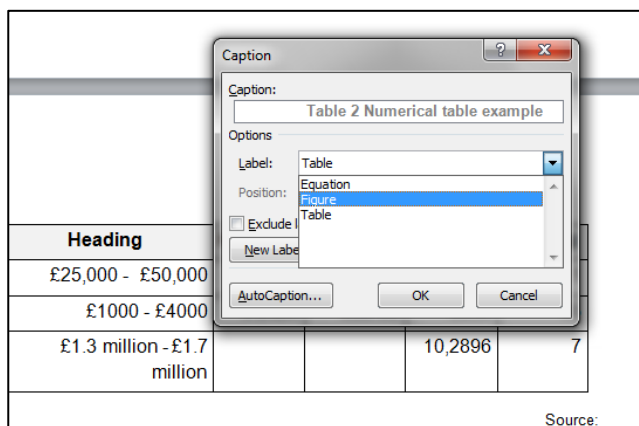


How to label tables and figures:

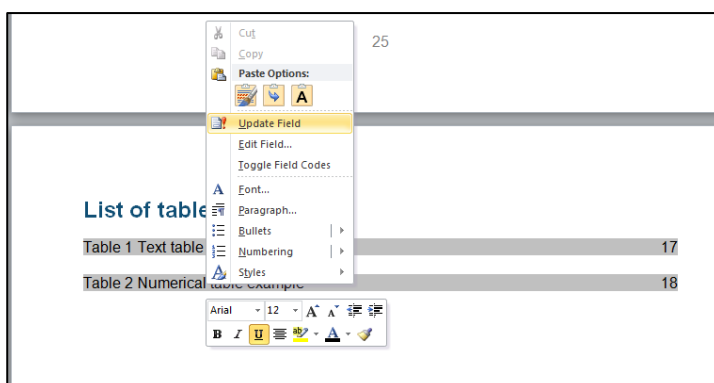
1. Click on the 'references tab' and go to insert caption.



2. Select the appropriate term and write in the title of the table/figure into the caption box
3. Click okay.

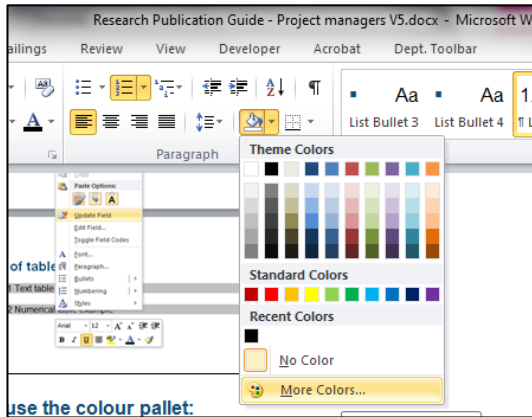


The list of figures/tables is generated automatically from the caption style. To update the list of figures/tables to reflect changes in page numbering, right-click on the list of figures/tables and click 'update field'.

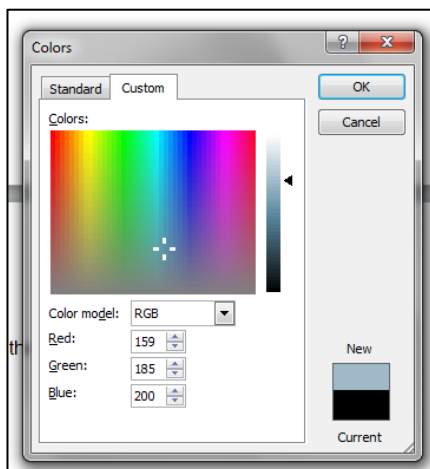


How to use the colour palette:

1. Click on the shading or font colour to make the necessary changes to the text or background colour.
2. Click on more colours.



3. Click to custom and using the colour palette in insert the numbers relating to the colour you wish to use (Once you have used the colour it will appear in your recent colours).



Using a good colour contrast

When using text boxes in a report ensure that there is a good contrast between the foreground and background. You will need to make your own judgements about if there is a good contrast.

Don't use colour or shape as the only way to identify something in your document. Use text labels or descriptions instead.

If you choose to use a text box with a background colour, the background should be from the DfE approved colour palette and the text should provide a clear contrast.

Add alternative text to photos, tables, flowcharts and diagrams

Alternative text, also known as 'alt text,' appears when you hover your mouse over a picture or object. It looks like a text label providing more information about that item. People with visual impairments may not be able to pick up the significance of the images alone.

Alt text helps people who use screen readers to understand the content and context of images in your document, even when they can't see them properly. Alt text should be included for any of the following in a research report: charts, graphs, diagrams, logos etc. Any time there is a visual representation of meaning, you need to add alt text.

You need to add a title, and a description in Microsoft Word. The title is a very brief description, for example "figure 9 bar chart". The description text adds more detail. The description text should be approximately 1-2 lines/up to 4 sentences long and should add value by describing what the image shows rather than simply repeating the title. For example: 'This bar chart shows an upward trend in expenditure over a six year period from 2007 to 2013;' 'The figure shows that pupils in Sweden perform better than pupils in the UK at ages 10 and 14 years.' If the image is too complicated to describe concisely and its contents are already covered adequately in the text, you can choose to set your alt-text to be a full description of this item follows"; please only do this if really necessary.

If your image is made of a lot of little images, for example a flowchart, it is preferable to cut and paste all the composite parts into a single image and then add alt-text. Remember to keep a copy saved as an editable version in case you need to update the artwork in future.

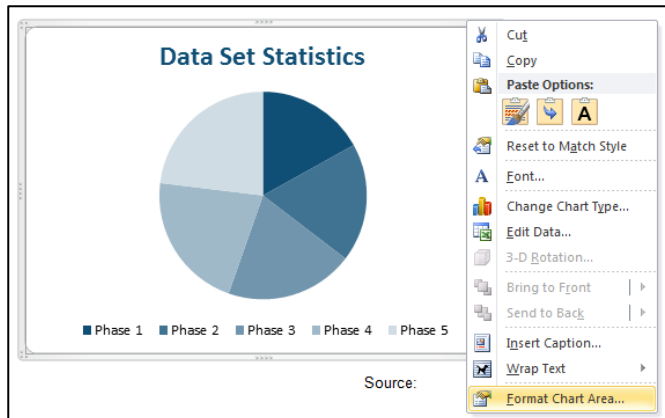
The following links are to advice produced by Penn State University which provides some helpful tips on creating meaningful alt-text for complicated visual elements:

<http://accessibility.psu.edu/images>

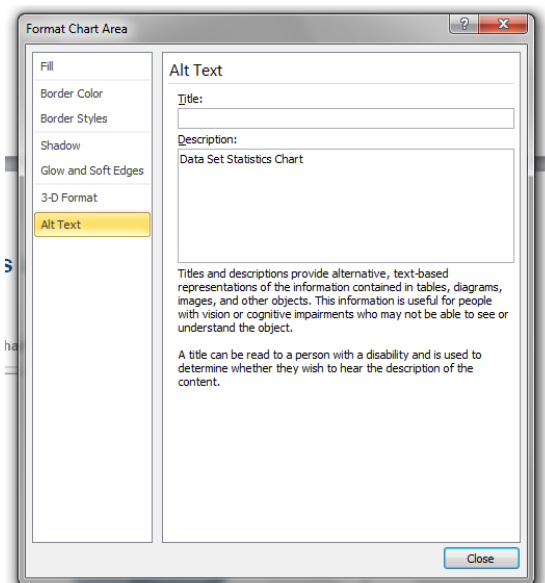
<http://accessibility.psu.edu/longdescription>

How to add alt text in Word 2010

1. Right click on the image or object
2. Choose format.



3. Choose Alt Text.
4. Enter a description of the image or object into the title and description text boxes.
Use clear, concise descriptions.
5. Click close.



Use hyperlink text that is meaningful and test all your links

Hyperlink text in your documents should provide a clear description of what the visitor will find at the link destination, rather than only providing the URL, or ambiguous words like “here” or “this.” You should always aim to write short concise link text so the person can predict where they will end up, before they click on it.

For example [Munro review of child protection: final report](#) rather than: [LA Action Research - Cover Paper for MAG on Final Report.doc](#)

Structure tables so they can be navigated easily

If you use a layout table, check the reading order to be sure that it makes sense (for English: left to right, top to bottom).

Avoid using tables within tables (nesting), or merged or split cells inside of tables. This makes the data predictable and easy to navigate using a screen reader or the keyboard shortcuts.

When you use complex tables, they become unpredictable to navigate and end up being read out in a meaningless, confusing, and unpredictable order.

How to check the reading order

4. Tab through the cells sequentially
5. Check that cursor moves through your table in a logical order

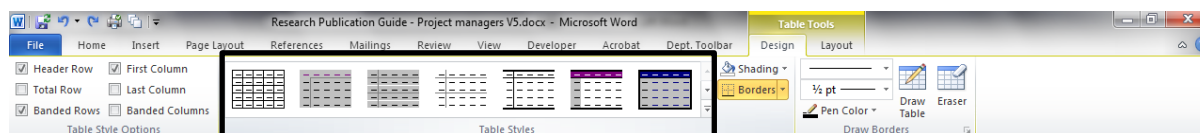
Table 2 Numerical table example

| | Heading | Heading | Heading | Heading | Heading | Heading |
|-----|---------|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Row | 12% | £25,000 - £50,000 | 0.07286 | £100.00 | 8762 | 1 |
| Row | 17.5% | £1000 - £4000 | 0.2328 | £50.00 | 9839 | 45 |
| Row | 20% | £1.3 million - £1.7 million | | | 10,2896 | 7 |

Source:

How to specify a header row in a table:

6. Click anywhere in the table.
7. On the table tools design tab, in the table style options group, select the header row check box.
8. Add your header information.



Avoid using repeated blank/design characters

People who use screen readers to read documents electronically may perceive extra spaces, tabs and empty paragraphs as blanks. After hearing “blank” several times, those users may mistakenly think that they have reached the end of the information. Equally, don’t use long sequences of full stops, dashes or underscores to space out content, the

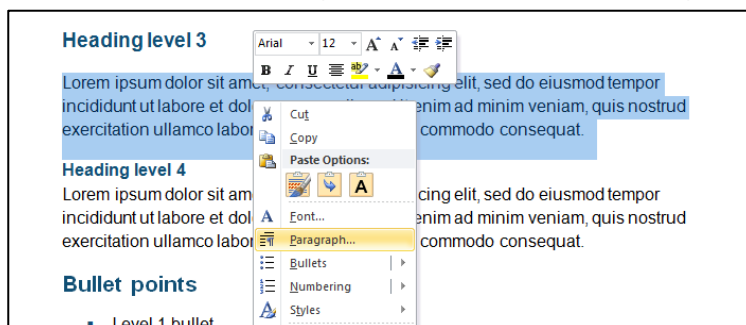
screen reader will still read out the text literally, i.e., “Read more full stop, full stop, full stop”, which quickly becomes frustrating for the user.

The ‘word accessibility’ check will pick up all the instances of repeated blank spaces.

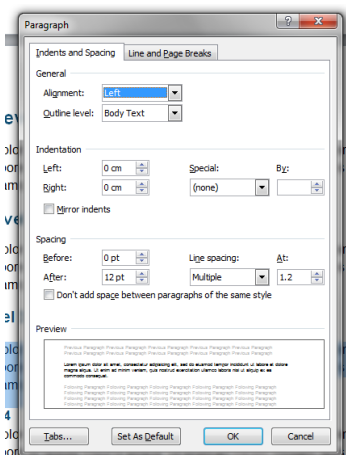
Instead, use formatting, indenting, and styles to create whitespace and be careful of repeating characters in your content.

How to use formatting to add whitespace around a paragraph:

1. Remove any existing whitespace around the paragraph.
2. Select the text, then right-click and choose paragraph.



3. Select values for ‘indentation and spacing’ to create whitespace



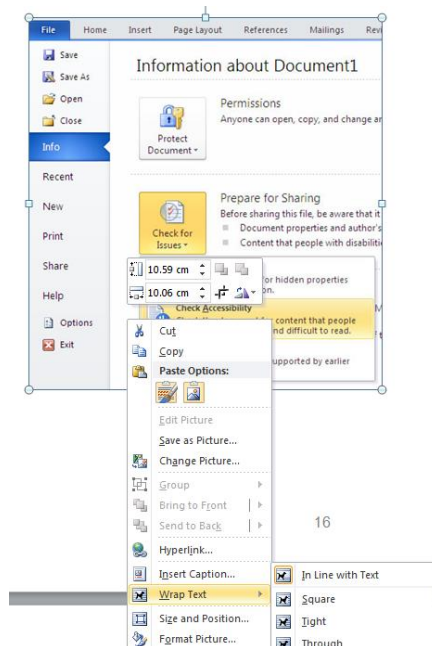
Avoid using floating objects

Floating objects are things like coloured text boxes and featured call outs, that are not in line with main text. They are usually challenging to navigate, and depending on the colour-scheme, they may be inaccessible to users with vision impairment.

Setting text-wrapping around objects to ‘top and bottom or in line with text’ makes it easier for people with screen readers to follow the structure of your document.

How to change the text-wrapping around objects:

9. Select the object, and right-click.
10. Choose wrap Text, and then select either 'in line with text' or 'top and bottom' from the list.



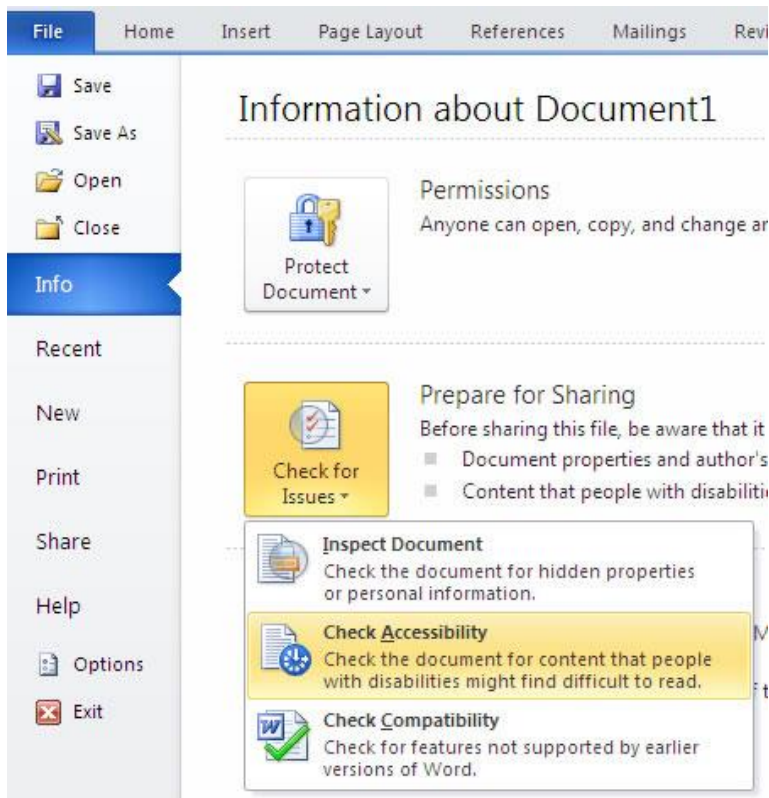
Ensure the document can be zoomed in

If your document has small, fine details, or a very small font in places, make sure your users can zoom in sufficiently so they can see all the small details clearly.

Test the document using Microsoft word 2010's accessibility checker

Microsoft Word 2010 includes an accessibility checker that allows you to check for problems. This will identify most outstanding accessibility issues in your finished document.

To run the accessibility checker in Microsoft word 2010: Select file > info > check for issues > check accessibility.



Word generates a list of issues to rectify. The document cannot be submitted for publication until all issues have been addressed. If the list is very long and repetitive this is likely to be because the document does not make effective use of Word formatting features; for example, multiple carriage returns have been used in lieu of a space break, or spaces have been used in lieu of indents.

Note that some aspects of accessibility are a matter of common sense and judgement; for example, the Word accessibility checker will not inspect colour contrasts to ensure that they are sufficiently clear.

Approved colour palette

| | Blue | Red | Orange | Yellow | Green | Purple |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 100% | | | | | | |
| | RGB R16 G79 B117 | RGB R138 G37 B41 | RGB R232 G125 B30 | RGB R194 G162 B4 | RGB R0 G71 B18 | RGB R38 G8 B89 |
| 80% | | | | | | |
| | RGB R64 G114 B145 | RGB R161 G81 B84 | RGB R237 G151 B75 | RGB R206 G181 B54 | RGB R51 G108 B65 | RGB R81 G57 B122 |
| 60% | | | | | | |
| | RGB R112 G149 B172 | RGB R185 G124 B127 | RGB R241 G177 B120 | RGB R218 G199 B104 | RGB R102 G145 B113 | RGB R125 G107 B155 |
| 40% | | | | | | |
| | RGB R159 G185 B200 | RGB R208 G168 B169 | RGB R246 G203 B165 | RGB R231 G218 B135 | RGB R153 G181 B160 | RGB R168 G156 B189 |
| 20% | | | | | | |
| | RGB R207 G220 B227 | RGB R232 G211 B212 | RGB R250 G229 B210 | RGB R243 G236 B205 | RGB R207 G218 B189 | RGB R212 G206 B222 |